

Detroit workers denounce water shutoffs on eve of SEP meeting

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As Detroit city workers and retirees face savage attacks on their health care and pension benefits as part of the bankruptcy restructuring plan, city officials are proceeding with their plan to shut off service to tens of thousands of residents who cannot afford to pay their water bills. Households that owe as little as \$150—in America’s poorest big city—are facing shutoff.

The city says 150,000 Detroit properties are being targeted, with between 1,500 and 3,000 being shut off each week. Service terminations are being carried out during the day while residents are at work, with little or no notice. According to residents who spoke to the *World Socialist Web Site*, the city is charging fees both for the shutoff and to have water turned back on, adding an additional \$120 to the bills of workers who are already unable to afford bare-bones necessities.

According to Kristin Pierce of *My 20 Detroit*, at least 500 confirmed shutoffs have occurred so far. WSWs reporters have already encountered numerous residents, including many with small children, who have lost their water service.

In opposition to this criminal policy, the Socialist Equality Party is holding a public meeting today at the Unitarian-Universalist Church at 4605 Cass Avenue (at the corner of Cass and Forest). The purpose of the meeting is to mobilize the working class to fight back against the shutoffs, as part of the broader struggle against the Detroit bankruptcy and the social counterrevolution being waged against workers nationwide.

The WSWs spoke to workers in front of a Detroit Water and Sewerage Department (DWSD) payment collection center Tuesday. Workers condemned the shutoff policy and spoke about the need for a struggle to defend the rights of the population.

Tiffany Shipp, an auto parts worker, said, “They used

to give us at least a little wiggle room. Now they don’t even knock on your door. Even if you’re just a bit behind on payment, they’ll shut you off before you know it. My mom just paid her bill, and they still shut her off and I have a baby at home. What the heck am I going to do?”

“How are we supposed to pay for water when there are no jobs?” Tiffany asked. “I finally got a job, by the grace of God. I have an associate’s degree, and now I’m thankful just to have a job doing manual labor for a pittance. I work in the auto plant, and they have this two-tier wage system. It is clearly supposed to generate resentment among the workers and undermine solidarity.

“The union isn’t interested in raising our wages, but they do want to jack up our dues at every chance. The unions are pimps—they’re pimping us.

“It’s getting really rough out here. With gas and heating bills on top of the water, we are struggling just to put food on the table. Peoples’ rights, wages, and decency are being destroyed. Things are splitting in two: it’s the rich versus the working and poor.”

Regarding cuts in food stamps and other attacks by the Obama administration, Tiffany added, “Obama is BS on every level. He told us to go to school and work hard. Well, we’re working hard and we can’t even afford water anymore.”

Maurice Randolph spoke to the WSWs, saying, “Water is a basic right. How can you deny water to families? It’s a money grab. The whole city is being put up for grabs. They charge you a \$60 fee for both the shutoff and to have the water turned back on. It’s criminal.

“They are holding us hostage. If they could cut off your oxygen, they would. The big companies want people to work for slave wages, without the basic

amenities of life. It's all out war against the workers.

"When you look overseas in Greece and Egypt and Spain, you see workers and youth in the streets. That's what we need here in Detroit. All we lack is organization. Our old leaders have become misleaders. They are trying their hardest to keep the status quo. It's we the workers who make the world go round. We can't look to the politicians or the unions any more, they're the ones causing our problems," said Maurice.

Jerry Lake, a retired auto worker, told the WSWS, "I haven't been able to make payments for three months. This is partly because my house has been burglarized and I've had money stolen. I am just desperate. We are living in a state of freefall out here. We are going all out just to keep our heads above water, so to speak, and they are pushing us back down.

"They have water bursting from the mains, flooding the streets like something out of the Bible and at the same time they want our money right away or they'll shut us off over a couple hundred dollars.

"I know the unions won't help us out. The UAW never did anything for me during my long years in the plant, and when I got injured, they hung me out to dry," Jerry concluded.



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